

AMTRAK

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, at 12:30 today the Senate will consider a procedural motion to go to the Amtrak reauthorization bill. I am urging my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to support it.

For a long time Amtrak has been a question mark in Washington—will it survive? Do we need it? It will survive if we have the will to support it. The question whether we need it has been answered convincingly. All across the United States, not just in the northeast corridor, in my State of Illinois, Amtrak has become an affordable alternative for people who cannot afford to pay for gasoline for their cars. Amtrak ridership is higher now than it has been for decades in Illinois. It is very difficult for a person in my State to get a reservation for a seat on an Amtrak train. Clearly it is a popular means of transportation and in demand. Friends of mine who tried to travel from downstate to Chicago say unless you think weeks in advance to make a reservation, you can't get on the train—and of course I think that is the wave of the future, and a good one. More and more people taking this affordable alternative are leaving their cars behind and are leaving congestion and pollution behind. That is a positive development.

But we cannot have an Amtrak moving forward that serves the needs of America without an authorization bill. The last time we passed an Amtrak authorization bill into law was in 1997. It has been 11 years since we passed an authorization and, as a result, this agency has been languishing, surviving from year to year, lurching from one inadequate budget to the next, trying to stay alive. The Amtrak trains you see on the tracks today are rolling stock that is pretty ancient by travel standards.

By travel standards, it has been around 20, 30, 40 years. It has been pushed to the limit. Now we need it more than ever, and we need to pass this authorization bill.

Our leader on the Democratic side is Senator LAUTENBERG. FRANK LAUTENBERG of New Jersey has really made a name for himself in the field of transportation during his service in the Senate, and he has worked so hard to make sure Amtrak moves forward in the 21st century.

We need to pass this authorization bill today. This bill does so many things that are absolutely essential: increases capital grants to Amtrak so it can start rebuilding its trackage, making sure it is safe and that trains can move faster so they can have better ontime performance.

They also develop State passenger corridors. Illinois has a terrific program and a lot of demand for expansion of Amtrak. Downstate, we now have three different corridors: St. Louis to Chicago, Quincy to Chicago, and the route that runs through Champaign and Carbondale. But we have requests

from northern Illinois, Rockford, Galena, into Dubuque, IA. We have requests from Chicago to the Quad Cities and into Iowa, even farther. All of these communities begged me for the opportunity for Amtrak service.

Many of these same communities have been coming to Congressmen and Senators over the years asking for air service. They still want it, but they are realistic in realizing short-haul service is now better served by passenger rail or at least can be supplemented with passenger rail, and so they are asking for that alternative too. We need to expand that opportunity around the United States.

If you want to order a new Amtrak train and cars, get on a waiting list in Canada or Europe. We don't make many, if any, here in the United States. That has to change too. With Amtrak with a clear and bright future, I believe there can be more investment in capital in Amtrak here in the United States. I would like to see facilities in my State of Illinois or some adjoining State building the train cars we need for the future instead of heading off to Canada or Europe and trying to bid for them.

We also have to come to a better relationship with the freight railroads. You see, with very few exceptions, Amtrak doesn't own the railroad track, the freight railroads do, and there was a long-standing agreement that Amtrak would have priority to move passengers over that freight rail track. Well, of course, that means Amtrak is at the mercy of dispatchers who will put a loaded passenger train on a siding or a passing track and let it sit for long periods of time waiting for a freight train. That is not the way it is supposed to work. The passenger rail, Amtrak, is supposed to have priority. In this bill, we give the Surface Transportation Board the ability to take a look and see if the freight railroads are discriminating against Amtrak in terms of service and whether damages should be awarded.

Finally, after all of these years, we put some teeth into the enforcement of a law that has been on the books for a long time saying that the freight railroads have to work to give the passenger rails this kind of opportunity. This is an important piece of legislation, long overdue. It has been held up for so many years, and it is so important that we do it now.

We believe, as I think most Americans do, that high-speed rail is part of our future. It is not just a nostalgic view of the past with passenger trains; it is part of our future as well.

This bill has important investments in Amtrak, important improvements when it comes to rail safety.

One of the provisions in this bill will require, over time, that they put on the engines of trains what they call positive train control. What that means is we would have avoided the accident in Los Angeles that killed people recently. When a train would ap-

proach a red light, the engineer would have to give a positive force to change the train or it would automatically shut down and slow down. So it really creates a safety measure that could have saved lives in California and will save lives across America if it is instituted. That and several other things here will make a big difference in passenger service.

I hope this bill gets a strong bipartisan rollover of support. I know there are Republicans who feel strongly, as I do, that this is an important step forward for the 21st century for passenger service on trains for Americans and that Amtrak is part of America's future.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from New Mexico.

Mr. DOMENICI. I know we don't have a lot of time, so I will try, if it is all right, to ask for 5 minutes. Is somebody controlling our time here?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, the Senator is recognized.

ECONOMIC BAILOUT

Mr. DOMENICI. Let me thank the distinguished Senator from Tennessee, LAMAR ALEXANDER, for his eloquent remarks here this morning. I would say to anyone who wants to try to understand the situation we are in, in terms that everybody can see and feel, they ought to read his speech.

I also thank him because he used a metaphor I developed with some of my staff to try to explain this, and he has added to it and amplified it. He has taken the idea that we came up with in my office—I asked my staff to sit down with me and talk, and the only thing we could think of about the clogging of this passageway was a word that didn't sound as though it was a very good word to use, which was "constipation." I said: Could we not think of some metaphor that is better than that?

After 20 minutes or so, the idea came forth of a superhighway, with four or six lanes loaded with cars traveling at full speed, 65, 70 miles an hour, and then there was a crash that took all lanes and stopped all of them and the cars piled up for miles back.

As the good Senator from Tennessee, a wonderful friend of mine, has gone on from that simple beginning I just described to analogize the entire problem we have, that accident where—these cars that are all cracked up are the toxic assets we are buying. They are toxic because they are all broken down, they are not worth anything anymore, and we are going to buy them. That is why we are setting up this rescue fund. When we buy them, eventually get them, all of the cars will be loosened from that long 20, 30 miles that they are blocked by this accident, which is the toxic assets, but it is really the cars stopping movement. And then he went on to explain what all those cars were, because so many people think